

*Fears

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All human beings spend their entire lives coexisting with the irrepressible feeling of fear. According to Cambridge Dictionary, fear is “an unpleasant emotion or thought that you have when you are frightened or worried by something dangerous, painful, or bad that is happening or might happen”. Unfortunately, dangerous, painful, and bad situations are quite common. Moreover, even in the absence of present pain, we are tortured by the anticipation of pains yet to come (and our dear friend, the feeling of anxiety, comes in to join the party). So, naturally, the feeling of fear is inherent in all of us. We worry and worry about the typical concerns we are afflicted with in the course of our lives. No matter what stage of life we are in, Fear is almost a stalker, lurking us in every stage of our lives, like Joe Goldberg from YOU.

When in childhood, the feeling of fear finds us in our most creative era. Paradoxically, in our stage of pure innocence we do tend to feel fearful about certain things, perhaps without being conscious of it. Children’s fears, though often dismissed as capricious or irrational, are in fact deeply based on developmental psychology. From the ghostly, sharp-toothed monsters lurking under beds to the thunderous storms, these fears—though seemingly trivial to adults—mirror a child’s burgeoning understanding of a vast, unpredictable world. The fear of separation, for instance, results from an innate dependence on their parents and reflects an evolving awareness of impending autonomy. Though occasionally expressed through dramatic sobs and quivering lips, these fears are anything but frivolous; they are a support for resilience, gradually equipping children with the emotional intelligence to navigate an increasingly complex reality.

Adolescence is a turbulent period in which fears evolve from an imaginary boogeyman to far more insidious adversaries—like public speaking, social isolation, or the dread of a pimple appearing on picture day. No longer frightened by shadows on the wall, teenagers now struggle with abstract terrors such as inadequacy, judgment, and the ever-looming specter of “not fitting in.” Their fears are intensified by hormonal hurricanes and a prefrontal cortex still under development, rendering them enormously sensitive to the eyebrow raise of a peer or the ominous “seen” checkmark on a text left unanswered. Whether it’s the paralytic anxiety of raising one’s hand in class or the overwhelming decision of what to wear to avoid being the target of ridicule, adolescent fears—though occasionally melodramatic—are real, raw, and wildly relatable. And while adults may scoff at these seemingly minor crises, for teens, every social interaction feels like an extremely difficult psychological opera, accompanied with the soundtrack of self-doubt.

Adulthood comes along with a refined catalogue of fears—less about ghosts in the closet and more about emails that begin with “per my last message.” The adult psyche is a labyrinthine of concerns: financial ruin disguising as “budgeting,” romantic decay reformulated in “growing apart,” and the silent horror of realizing you left the stove on... three holidays ago. Unlike the flamboyant fears of youth, adult anxieties tend to wear business casual and arrive via Google Calendar. There is the chronic dread of medical test results, the existential panic induced by unread work emails on a Sunday night, and the creeping suspicion that everyone else received a manual on how to be a functioning human—except you! Even leisure becomes filled with anxiety: is it self-care, or procrastination? Are you relaxed, or just dissociating attractively? In the grand theater of

adulthood, fear no longer howls in the night—it sips coffee, pays taxes, and smiles politely while screaming internally.

Alas, in the golden years of life, fear does not retire—it simply exchanges costumes, trading jump scares for the quiet terror of forgetting why you walked into a room. Elderly fears are subtler, more philosophical, yet no less formidable: the dread of becoming obsolete in a world moving at Wi-Fi speed, the paranoia that every ache is either arthritis or the grim reaper stretching. While teenagers fear being unnoticed, older adults fear being unheard—by doctors, by society, and occasionally by their own hearing aids. Beneath these common fears lies a poignant reality: the fear of losing independence, relevance, or worse: memories. Still, many seniors face these feelings with wry wit, iron resilience, and a healthy mistrust of QR codes —because nothing is more terrifying than to scan a menu wearing glasses in a dimly lit café.

We cannot escape the ominous feeling of fear. It is present among us all, taking several forms throughout the different stages of life: in childhood, it is disguised as a monster in the wardrobe; in adolescence, it takes the shape of the desire to fit in; in adulthood, it appears as responsibility and, in our elderly lives, it takes the shape of dependence. However, the different manifestations of fear throughout our entire lives share the same characteristic: they all evoke a constant sense of surveillance. The ultimate goal to combat these fears is to keep ourselves grounded in this maddening world and to avoid potential threats that may arise. Can we do anything about these negative thoughts? We should strive to align our desires and thoughts with whatever is within our control and accept what is not, in order to fully enjoy the present moment, free from the terrifying feeling of departure, suffering, and ultimately, from life itself.

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